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DEEP SPACE EXPLORATION NEXT, PREPARE FOR IT: PM TO SCIENTISTS

PM on Saturday announced that India was preparing to set up a pool of astronauts for future missions, and asked youth to be part of it

ACHIEVING MILESTONES NATURAL TRAIT: MODI

In a video address on National Space Day, PM Modi said, "We have reached the moon and Mars. Now, we have to peek into deep space, where several secrets that would benefit the future of humanity lie hidden." Achieving one milestone after another in the space sector has now become a natural trait of India and its scientists, Modi said

EXHORTS PRIVATE PLAYERS TO STEP UP

- Modi said India viewed space technology not only as a tool for scientific exploration but also as a means to enhance ease of living
- The PM also asked the private players to come forward for deep space exploration. "... Can we reach a point where we can launch 50 rockets every year?" he asked space scientists and engineers | P9

Aug 23
IS NATIONAL SPACE DAY TO MARK LANDING OF CHANDRAYAAN-3 ON MOON

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

Postal service to US first to take the hit

Temporary suspension to impact small-scale exports

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

IN a significant development with far-reaching implications for trade and personal shipments, the Department of Posts announced on Saturday a temporary suspension of all postal services to the US, effective August 25, citing "operational challenges" arising from new customs regulations.

The move follows the issuance of Executive Order No. 14324 by the US administration on July 30, which revokes the long-standing duty-free de minimis exemption for imported goods valued at up to USD 800. The new rules, coming into effect on August 29, will subject all international shipments to customs duties under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act framework.

"All international postal items destined for the USA, regardless of their value, shall be subject to customs duties," an official release from the Ministry of Communications said, adding that only letters/documents and gift items valued up to USD 100 will remain exempt for the time being. Although the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued preliminary guidelines on August 15, key components of the new customs framework, including the designation of "qualified parties" authorised to collect and remit duties remain "undefined", according to the department.

FILE PHOTO

"Several critical processes... remain undefined. Consequently, US-bound air carriers have expressed their inability to accept postal consignments after August 25, 2025, citing lack of operational and technical readiness," the press release noted. The suspension comes amid escalating trade tensions between New Delhi and Washington. President Donald Trump recently announced 25% tariff on Indian goods that could couple with an additional 25% penalty targeting India's purchases of Russian oil, effectively raising the total tariff burden on certain imports to 50%.

It sparked concerns within India's trade and logistics sectors, given the volume of small-scale exports and personal shipments reliant on international postal services.

The negotiations (with US) are still going on. The bottom line is, we have some red lines. Those are the interests of our farmers and small producers. That's not something we can compromise on

— S Jaishankar

Strategic autonomy

"That's our right (buying Russian oil). In my business, we would say that's what strategic autonomy is about," the external affairs minister said at an event in New Delhi | P9

Sergio Gor is Trump envoy pick for India

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

IN a key diplomatic move underscoring the Trump administration's evolving strategy in Asia, President Donald Trump appointed Sergio Gor as the US Ambassador to India and Special Envoy for South and Central Asian Affairs. The announcement came at a time of growing tensions between Washington and New Delhi over trade issues and India's continued energy and economic engagement with Russia.

At 39, Gor becomes the youngest US ambassador to India, replacing Eric Garcetti, a Biden-era appointee who vacated the post in January. His dual appointment signals a consolidation of regional diplomatic leadership under a figure with deep loyalty to Trump and substantial influence in the current administration. As Director of the White House Office of Presidential Personnel, Gor played a key role in staffing the federal government with Trump-aligned officials. The president credited him with hiring nearly 4,000 "America First Patriots" across federal agencies in record time.

Sergio Gor

"Sergio is a great friend who has been at my side for many years... For the most populous region in the world, it is important that I have someone I can fully trust to deliver on my agenda and help us MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN," Trump said, emphasising the political trust underpinning the appointment.

A low-profile but powerful operative, Gor held senior roles in both presidential campaigns, including management of a pro-Trump Super PAC, and involvement in publishing the former president's best-selling books. His loyalty and behind-the-scenes influence earned him a reputation as one of the administration's most trusted aides.

First module of India's maiden space stn to lift off in 2028: ISRO chief

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

THE first module of India's ambitious maiden space station, the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), will be launched into space in 2028, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman V Narayanan said on Saturday. The module weighing 10 tonnes will be the first part of the BAS, which once done will weigh 52 tonnes.

At the inauguration of the second National Space Day in New Delhi, Narayanan said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had approved the BAS mission, besides okaying the Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV) capable of carrying much heavier payloads than ISRO launchers are currently capable of. The first module is the foundation and the first of five parts of BAS that will be completely set up in the Low Earth Orbit (LEO) at an altitude of 450km.

The first module will comprise indigenously developed technologies, including the docking system, the hatch system and the environmental control and life support system. The module has been designed for microgravity conditions and for extravehicular technologies.

As per the Indian space programme's roadmap, ISRO is looking at setting up BAS by 2035 for Indian astronauts to live in low-earth orbit to conduct experiments, for which an astronaut pool is also being planned.

Narayanan highlighted the growing capabilities of Indian launchers in carrying progressively heavier payloads into space. He said the first Indian launcher – the SLV-3 – carried a 35Kg vehicle to LEO. The launcher's liftoff mass was 17 tonnes. "From then until today, we have conceived a rocket to take 80,000 kg (80 tonnes) of payload to LEO and the capability of launching a 40-storey-high rocket with 2,600 tonne lift-off mass capability powered by 20,240 tonne LOX-methane rocket engine. We have demonstrated a lot of new technologies this year. We have made a breakthrough in the semi-cryo propulsion system. It was declared by the Prime Minister in 2023 and seven tests have been completed," he said.

Narayanan said that after a gap of 10 years, a national meet was held on Friday which set guidelines for applications, including satellite-communications, navigation and earth observation for India. A road map till 2047 has also been written along with how it has to be achieved. MORE: P7

EXPRESS READ

Woman's body found floating in Lalbagh lake

Bengaluru: The body of a woman was found floating in a lake at Lalbagh Botanical Garden on Saturday. She had run away from Vani Vilas Hospital, where her newborn was being treated. It is suspected that she was suffering from post-partum depression | P3

TMC opts out of JPC, SP may follow suit

New Delhi: The TMC on Saturday said it will not send any member to the JPC to look into three bills on the removal of the prime minister and chief ministers. The Samajwadi Party is also unlikely to nominate any member to the panel, a party source said | P9

Pak FM in B'desh in high profile visit in 13 years

Dhaka: Pakistan's foreign minister flew to Bangladesh on Saturday as the nations, once bitter enemies after they split in 1971, seek to rebuild ties with regional power balances shifting. Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar is the senior most Pakistani official to visit Dhaka since 2012 | P11

KERALA MLA
AUDIO CLIP DEEPENS ROW

New audio clip of Rahul Mamkoottathil has surfaced in which he is heard forcing a woman to have an abortion, saying, "If I wanted to kill you, how long do you think I would need?" | P7

CBI books Anil Ambani, RCOM in ₹2,929 crore bank fraud case

MUKESH RANJAN @ New Delhi

THE Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conducted searches at industrialist Anil Ambani's Seawind residence in Mumbai's Cuffe Parade on Saturday in a ₹2,929.05 crore bank fraud case involving Reliance Communications Limited (RCOM).

The raids began at 7 am, with Ambani and his family present, officials said.The CBI acted after registering a 20-page FIR in Delhi, naming Ambani, RCOM, unknown public servants, and others as accused, based on a complaint from SBI.

SBI said that RCOM, under Ambani's leadership, defrauded the bank of ₹2,929.05 crore, including a fund-based principal of ₹2,227.64 crore and non-fund-based bank guarantees worth ₹786.52 crore. SBI had classified RCOM and Ambani as "fraud" on June 13, 2025, under RBI's Fraud Risk Management guidelines, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary informed the Lok Sabha in a written reply recently.

Anil Ambani

RCOM's Resolution Professional disclosed this to the Bombay Stock Exchange on July 1, 2025. SBI formally complained to the CBI on August 18, 2025, prompting the FIR.

A spokesperson on behalf of Anil Ambani said: "The complaint by SBI pertains to matters dating back more than 10 years... Mr Ambani was a Non-Executive Director then, with no involvement in day-to-day management. Mr Ambani has been selectively singled out."

DHARMASTHALA CASE

SIT arrests whistleblower for making false claims

VINCENT D'SOUZA @Mangaluru

IN a dramatic twist in the Dharmasthala mass burial case, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Saturday arrested the whistleblower and original complainant in the case on charges of perjury. SIT sources confirmed that the complainant hailed from Mandya district. He was taken into custody following forensic evidence that contradicted his claims.

The arrest came a day after SIT chief Pranab Mohanty interrogated him for several hours. On Saturday morning, he was subjected to a medical examination and subsequently produced before the jurisdictional court in Dharmasthala, which remanded him to police custody for 10 days.

The case took root on July 11, when the witness-complainant voluntarily appeared before a magistrate in Belthangady and produced a skull and bones, claiming they belonged to a woman who was allegedly raped and murdered in Dharmasthala. However, forensic analysis revealed the remains were male, undermining the foundation of his allegations.

Reacting to the arrest, Dharmasthala Dharmadhikari D Veerendra Heggade said the truth is gradually emerging. Activist Girish Mattannavar, who had earlier supported the mass burial allegations, welcomed the arrest but urged that the witness-complainant undergo a narco-analysis to establish the full truth. He cautioned against jumping to conclusions solely based on the complainant's arrest.

The whistleblower had previously made sensational claims that he helped bury and burn bodies of hundreds of women who were sexually assaulted and murdered. Based on his testimony, the SIT excavated 17 sites he had identified, reportedly recovering human remains in only two locations. As the investigations yielded little evidence, pressure mounted on the Karnataka government and SIT to arrest him for allegedly misleading authorities.

BJP SEEKS NIA PROBE: P4

Bundles of currency notes seized from the house of Chitradurga Congress MLA KC Veerendra (inset) during raids by the Directorate of Enforcement | EXPRESS

MLA Veerendra held, ₹12cr cash seized

G SUBHASH CHANDRA
@ Bengaluru / Chitradurga

CHITRADURGA Congress MLA KC Veerendra, who was raided by the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) for owning and operating online and offline betting companies and casinos, was arrested on Saturday at Gangtok in Sikkim and produced before the judicial magistrate there for a transit remand to be produced before a jurisdictional court in Bengaluru.

During ED raids on Friday and Saturday, Rs 12 crore in cash, including Rs 1 crore in foreign currency, gold Jewellery worth over Rs 6 crore, silver articles of 10 kg and four SUVs were seized under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. ED also froze 17 bank accounts and 2 bank lockers of Veerendra and his immediate family.

The ED Bengaluru zonal office conducted the searches at 31 locations across the country, including Gangtok, Challakere in Chitradurga district, Bengaluru, Hubballi, Jodhpur, Mumbai and Goa. Five casinos – Puppy's Casino Gold, Ocean Rivers Casino, Puppy's Casino Pride, Ocean 7 Casino and Big Daddy Casino -- were also raided.

The searches revealed that Veerendra is running several online betting sites, like King567, Raja567. His brother KC Thippeswamy, who is also one of the accused, is operating three businesses from Dubai – Diamond Softech, TRS Technologies and Prime9Technologies -- that are related to call centre services and gaming businesses of Veerendra. P7

FRIENDLY MATCH

After much flip-flop, Kerala on course to get Messi fever this November

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kochi

ON one moment, off the next. The Messi-to-Kerala saga has kept football fans on edge for nearly a year. The wait is over.

The Argentine Football Association (AFA) has confirmed that Lionel Messi and his World Cup-winning team will play an international friendly in Kerala, between November 10 and 18 this year. In all likelihood, Thiruvananthapuram will host the match, while the opponent is yet to be decided.

Posting the information, AFA wrote on X: "(Matches) in FIFA for October, between 6 and 14 will be played in US and for November, between 10 and 18 in Luanda, Angola, and Kerala, India (rivals to be determined)."

AFA India celebrated the milestone, noting the match stems from a year-long collaboration with the Kerala government, initiated in Madrid. "A new chapter in AFA's global expansion," they declared.

Kerala Sports Minister V Abdurahiman, who spearheaded the effort since November 2024, confirmed that Greenfield International Stadium in Thiruvananthapuram will be the venue.

"This is a historic moment. The two options we had were either October or November. In between, they tried to push it to next year, but we remained adamant in our demand as we aim to bring the 2022 World Cup winners to Kerala," he told reporters.

The minister said several top-50 FIFA teams had expressed interest in playing the friendly, with Australia emerging the frontrunner. Other teams that are in the fray to play against Argentina are Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Efforts are on to bring the Brazilian team.

For Kerala, where the Argentina-Brazil rivalry is woven into football folklore, Messi's presence would be nothing short of momentous.

The last time the Argentina football team played in India was in 2011 when it faced Venezuela in Kolkata's iconic Salt Lake Stadium.

This is a historic moment. In between, they tried to push it to next year, but we remained adamant to bring the 2022 World Cup winners to Kerala— V Abdurahiman, Kerala sports minister